DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 221 638 UD 022 533

AUTHOR Gutierrez, Manuel J.; Montalvo, Braulio
TITLE Puerto Rican Youth: Dropping Out and Delinquency.
PUB DATE Aug 82
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association (Washington, DC, August 23-27, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; *Delinquency; Dropout Prevention; *Dropouts; Drug Use; *Family Characteristics; Family Influence; Females; High Schools; Hispanic Americans; Males; *Parent Child Relationship; *Peer Influence; Pregnant Students; *Puerto Ricans; Socioeconomic Influences
IDENTIFIERS Pennsylvania (Philadelphia)

ABSTRACT

A 3-year longitudinal study of Puerto Rican youth (who were tenth graders during the first year of the study) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, sought to identify determinants of decisions to remain in school or drop out, and to investigate delinquency among this population. Among girls, the study found no correlation between delinquency and dropping out, although dropping out was strongly correlated with pregnancy. The data indicated that mothers' influence on their daughters tended to socialize females away from delinquency. The potential Puerto Rican female dropout was likely to have repeated a grade, to be unmotivated, and to come from an educationally unsupportive home, but tended to be overlooked as a problematic student. Among boys, a significant positive relationship was found between dropping out and delinquency. Tenth grade dropouts generally came from less economically able families than eleventh grade dropouts. Compared to non-delinquent dropouts, delinquent dropouts used drugs more frequently, failed in school more often, reported more friends in trouble with the law, and had parents who knew little about their sons' friends. The findings support a theoretical model that sees delinquency and decisions to drop out of school as being influenced by the family and the institutions that affect it: schools, peers, employment, church, and health services. (Author/MJL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED221638

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Manuel J. Gutierrez

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

PUERTO RICAN YOUTH: DROPPING OUT AND DELINQUENCY

Manuel J. Gutierrez, Ph.D.
Braulio Montalvo, M.A.

ASPIRA Research Project
526 W. Girard Avenue
Philadelphia, PA. 19123

Paper presented at the American Psychological Association Convention, Washington, D.C., August 23-27, 1982.

UD 022 533

The conclusions and interpretations presented in this report are the sole responsibility of the co-principal investigators and do not necessarily reflect the view of the National Institute of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

This paper will report on the most significant findings of a three-year longitudinal study seeking to identify factors which influence the decision of Puerto Rican youths to remain in school or to drop out, and to investigate the choice of non-delinquent and delinquent careers among this population. The study was funded by the National Institute of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

A cohort of 505 male and female Puerto Rican 10th graders in Philadelphia, and their mothers (or legal guardians) were surveyed during the study's first year and followed up on a yearly basis for two subsequent years. Retention rate was around 91% from year to year.

The cohort encompassed a subsample of parochial school students, which is not included in the results presented today. This subsample had an almost negligible dropout rate, a result in line with Coleman's (1981) present findings.

It should be noted that Hispanics have the highest dropout rate among ethnic groups in major urban centers. In Philadelphia, the dropout rate for Hispanics is about 1½ times higher than for Blacks and about twice as high as that of Whites. The 10th grade is considered the peak year for dropping out (60%-65% of all Hispanic dropouts do so in the 10th grade).

Our public school sample was almost equally divided among males and females; for the first year, dropouts accounted for 17% of the sample. At Year 2, dropouts constituted 24% of the sample, and 34% at Year 3.

Results are presented separately for boys and girls, as there were significant differences for both groups. Except where otherwise indicated, reported findings correspond to Year 2. Data analysis is presently under way for Year 3, the study's final follow-up year.

GIRLS

The most significant finding for Puerto Rican girls was the lack of association between delinquency and dropping out. As a whole, girls had a very low incidence (7%) of delinquent activity. Dropping out, however, was strongly associated with pregnancy. More than a third (37%) of the girls in the sample were pregnant or had had a child. The notion that Puerto Rican families effectively socialize females away from delinquent involvement draws support from our findings. Indeed, mothers of dropout girls were more likely to disapprove of their daughters' friends, friends who were characterized by the dropout as being either dropouts or having trouble in school. This reaction of vigilance on the part of mothers of dropouts seems to express a mechanism of boundary-making, of containing the girl and discouraging her from engaging in more severe trouble which could lead to delinquency. Mothers compete for influence with the daughters' peer group. They are intensely vigilant of the girls' peer associations, tending to be over-alert and judgemental, discouraging "bad company" before it can take a hold of the youngster and steer her behavior in a delinquent direction. They tend to err in the direction of intrusiveness and of thinking the girls' friends "worse" than they really are. Obviously, our findings reflect a basic cultural process shaping the girls' development. The process of socializing the girl is so fundamental that it resists the disruptive effects of migration, the transition from the rural island to the mainland urban ghetto, and the natural pressure to change the group's values to fit those of the host culture.

One profile of the potential dropout among Puerto Rican girls looks like this: while academically she is likely to have repeated a grade, she tends to be easily overlooked as a problematic student. She is mostly bored, unchallenged, and does not like school, where she brings aspects of the unmotivating environment usually prevailing in her family. But none of this makes her visible. Only when she becomes actively truant or already pregnant is she identified in the school as requiring assistance, at which point it might be too late. For earlier prediction and intervention, one needs to look at the family. The dropout girl's family is differentiated from the stay-in's family by an unsupportive atmosphere for school achievement, infrequent discussion of schoolwork and older siblings who have dropped out from school. Mothers of dropout girls were also more likely to dislike their neighborhood, as they felt that it was a dangerous place to raise children. Dropout girls were more prone to experience different behavioral problems at home such as running away, sleeping out without permission, and having tried alcohol and marijuana.

BOYS

For boys there was a significant relationship between dropping out and delinquency at both Year 1 and Year 2 of the project. Significantly more dropouts than stay-ins (27% vs. 12%/Yr. 1 and 30% vs. 14%/Yr. 2) were involved in some sort of trouble with the law during the previous year. When looking at behavioral problems often perceived as precursors of trouble with the law, Year 2 dropouts were more likely than stay-ins to have stayed out late at night, to have trespassed more often, and also to have been involved in petty delinquency (thefts of less than $50). These behavioral problems did not differentiate Year 1 dropouts from stay-ins. Drinking, and stealing something worth more than $50, associated with dropping our at Year 1, remained an effective differentiator for dropouts at Year 2.

Parental arrangement[1] is a useful exploratory concept in understanding the experience of dropping out. When comparing the 10th grade dropout with the 11th grade dropout the latter seems to come, in effect, from a different family, a unit with more adequacy of internal resources. In general, more fathers and mothers hold jobs, and the youngster himself stays longer in school, implying that he is better equipped to deal with school than the 10th grade dropout. The dropout from the 10th grade seems to come from the most vulnerable sector of the sample, the families less able to prevent casualties. At Year 1 most dropouts came from two-parent families where father was not working.

The relationship between economics and the family remains a powerful determinant for many dropouts. Parents of dropouts who were unemployed during

[1]This is a composite measure of marital status of parents and father's employment status.

Year 1 remained unemployed at Year 2, disclosing a chronic, instead of a cyclical, unemployment pattern. There is an apparent interaction between this pattern, which entails a kind of adult "dropping out" from the world of work, and the youngster's own dropping out from school, suggesting once more how some intra-familial system resonate to broader socio-economic forces.

Distinctions between the dropout who is not delinquent and the one who is delinquent can be made along the following dimensions: parental knowledge of youngsters' friends with its implied control over peer influences, use of drugs and a history of school failure. Parental knowledge of the youngsters' peers was significantly related to non-delinquency among dropouts. Furthermore, delinquent dropouts tended to report more friends in trouble with the law, and more frequent and diversified use of drugs, other than alcohol, for themselves. Their parents tended to disapprove of their friends. Delinquent dropouts also had a higher frequency of repeating a grade in school.

In terms of a longitudinal assessment, it is important to note that there were almost as many dropouts who decreased their delinquency involvement from one year to another (20%), as dropouts who incurred in delinquent activities both years (23%), with most dropouts being clear of delinquent activities for both years (53%). These findings are useful to counter a popular myth of community self-devaluation - that all dropouts become delinquent. Not only do some youngsters lessen their delinquent involvement upon dropping out, confirming an effect described by Elliott (1966), and Mukherjee (1971), but most dropouts do not get involved in delinquent activity upon dropping out. These findings argue for strategies to prevent dropping out and delinquency that are not implemented in shotgun fashion,

attempting to impact all grades in a somewhat equal manner. When looking separately at 10th grade and 11th grade dropouts, the former included a higher frequency of repeating offenders. Thus, it is apparent that 10th grade dropouts represent a more vulnerable group as a whole and require earlier special intervention for detection and prevention. There is increasing evidence suggesting that problems leading to dropping out and delinquency in the 10th grade have been in gestation during earlier grades (Wiatrowski, Hansell, Massey & Wilson, 1982). This evidence supports the need for early intervention programs focused on immediate and accelerated academic repair before the gap between an at-risk youngster and his peers widens, locking him into a negative path.

An interesting finding was that parents of stay-ins do not know as much as do parents of dropouts about how many of the youngsters' peers are in trouble with the law. Perhaps stay-ins are more cautious in letting their parents know about peers whom they know are in trouble with the law. They may experience more of their own association with those youngsters under active parental vigilance and control. If a parent knew, the parent would move on that knowledge to guide her son away from those peers into other relationships. The dropout may not be experiencing such a strain.

Parents of delinquents exhibited less closeness to Puerto Rican culture than parents of non-delinquents. This finding lends support for a notion that did not find support in the first year - that parents closer to the original culture and to its values are more able to enforce controls than parents more removed from those values (Ferracuti, Dinitz & Acosta de Brenes, 1975).

Hitting a teacher was strongly associated with delinquency though not with dropping out. This simple finding suggests that the prediction of serious and violent behavior will have to take into consideration contextual factors other than the youngster's personal characteristics and behavior. Knowledge of the schools and/or the family's tolerance of certain behaviors seems necessary to clarify how the institution engenders, discourages, or maintains the delinquent behavior. Knowledge of the youngster's perception of the institution is particularly revealing. In our sample these youngsters see themselves in a violent environment; perceived danger on the way to and from school as well as inside the school was significantly related to a delinquent status.

Alcohol remains the most popular drug used by youths, particularly among dropouts, whether these are delinquent or non-delinquent. The implications of its widespread use for the shaping of eventual alcoholic syndromes is suggested by adult statistics, particularly those pertaining to mortality from cirrhosis of the liver (Alers, 1978). The use of alcohol in adolescence is a generally acknowledged rite of passage. This rite captures a significant number of youngsters who go on to contribute to an awesome adult alcoholism statistic with ramifications into problems of health, mental health and crime. The choice and prevalence of alcohol use among dropouts as well as within the adult Hispanic population more than insinuates a measure of intra-familial tolerance or support for this behavior.

Dropouts and delinquents in our sample seem to exist in discrete contexts, with somewhat separate requirements of association and no easy overlap between dropping out and delinquency. There are more dropouts in trouble

with the law than stay-ins, but the data does not show a clear and inevitable path between one status and the other. Dropout youngsters do not report knowing more peers in trouble with the law than stay-ins. They will report, though, that their friends are using alcohol and drugs, powerful intermediate experiences which we know are likely to lead to trouble with the law.

Findings indicate that delinquents have more entrenched patterns of drug use at present (marijuana and alcohol). They also plan to use these two drugs more in the future than non-delinquents, as if expressing a commitment to a negative path. Delinquents have more friends who have been in trouble with the law during the past year. When reporting on a wide array of behavioral problems, parents of delinquents, more than those of non-delinquents, indicate as expected that their youngsters have been involved in more trouble in areas such as staying out late, sleeping out, skipping school, lying, stealing, drinking and smoking. A crucial dimension surfacing here is that parents of delinquents tend not to know most of their youngsters' friends. Those who do know them tend to approve less of those friends than do parents of non-delinquents.

To conclude, delinquency as a function of a pattern of differential peer association appears to be hinged to a broader pattern of ineffective or deteriorating parental vigilance over those associations. It does not seem to be only the power of those peer associations per se (Sutherland & Cressey, 1978) that accounts for entrenchment in a delinquent career but the extent to which those associations fall in or out of parental knowledge and control.

The findings change the preliminary theoretical model used at the start of our inquiry into this population (see Figure 1). They compel a

redrawing of the theoretical map, rearranging basic components of the model. The family interfaces with school and community become a more defined set of sectors which relate to key intra-familial processes. The findings differentiate within a net or ecology in which the family participates, establishing that some institutional sectors (employment, education, church and spiritualist, and health services) are more important than others. The intra-familial processes become more central, operating as intervening variables that buffer, modify or qualify the influences from all institutional sectors, very specially that of peers which stands almost as a formidable institutional force in its own right. In the new model, school-based variables move from being one more source in the community interfacing with the family to being an outstanding influence powerfully involved in success or failure experiences.

Insert Figure 1 about here

The new model (see Figure 2) reflects the more family centered perspective suggested by the findings, with the family impacted by sources that deplete or enhance, stabilize or destabilize, its processes for socializing youngsters. It assumes that the decisions to drop out or stay in, to become delinquent or non-delinquent, are shaped by means of these processes. Delinquency seems to be a product of unbalanced relationships between the family and several institutional sectors impinging on it - the school, youngsters' peers, employment, church participation, and health services. Our findings suggest interplays between these sectors which undermine or support the family, fostering or preventing dropping out and delinquency.

Insert Figure 2 about here

The new model, like the old, still sees delinquency as an inter-institutional product, but is based on less tentative formulations as to the importance of parental knowledge, vigilance and implied control over a youngster's peer associations, as well as a history of school failure. As a temporary model it can be reorganized by new findings.

Preliminary multivariate analysis (logit regression) supports the relevance of some of the sectors described in the new model. Repeating a grade, parental arrangement, and mother's disapproval of friends were strongly associated with dropping out, even when controlling for other variables included in different clusters. Also, parochial school attendance, youth's church attendance, and perception of a better future were associated with staying in school. Sex of youngster, mother's disapproval of friends, dropping out of school, school suspension and truancy all proved powerful predictors for delinquency. Continued exploration of the data through multivariate analysis will allow for corrections in the theoretical model, highlighting the relative predictive value of each sector and disclosing more of their interplays.

This discussion has emphasized the paths to dropping out and delinquency. From a more comprehensive perspective, we find within this Hispanic community - largely unemployed, uneducated and vulnerable to exploitation and crime - that many sources of strength exist, supporting the family and youngsters in traversing school years free of delinquent activity. Bachman (1978) has stated that dropping out is not a cause of delinquency, delinquency is a cause of dropping out. In regard to this Hispanic sample we must agree with Bachman that dropping out is not a cause of delinquency. Whether delinquency in our sample is a cause of dropping out remains to be seen as we analyze the third year data of this longitudinal study.

At this point, awaiting final results, the following implications emerge:

1) Programs aimed at changing the school from a discouraging to an effective and encouraging institution remain urgently necessary. The school is obviously a threatening setting, physically and psychologically, for a large number of Puerto Rican youngsters. It is a place of frustration and failure that systematically undermines the future.

2) Early intervention programs must be refocused on immediate and accelerated academic repair before the gap between the youngster and his/her peers widens, locking him/her into a situation where he/she inevitably drags behind, in a special track, until eventually dropping out.

3) In order to deal effectively with the dropping out process, it will not be enough to separately strengthen the school or the family. The association between parental arrangements and failure in school warrants new patterns of intervention at the junction of both institutions. Attention must be paid to the role of family structure in its dealings with the youngster and the school.

4) While both dropout boys and girls encounter academic failure, the behavioral manifestations preceding and accompanying the dropout process were markedly different for both. Differentiated approaches for male and female must be explored.

5) An emphasis on indirect means of intervention on dropout prevention is necessary. The association between lack of economic opportunity for fathers and dropping out among boys presents an indirect linkage between family structure and broader forces in the economic system. In this population, adult employment opportunities, especially for fathers, must be given at least the same priority as youth employment. Our data on the relationship between unemployment,

parental arrangements and dropping out support Bachman's (1971) notion that dropping out is a complex, not a simple measure or a problem in its own right, but rather a symptom of more basic underlying problems.

6) The significance of support for institutions and agencies (churches, community groups) that reinforce rituals and other aspects of family organization, is supported in this study.

7) The effects of cultural identity on dropping out and delinquency need to be explored further. If cultural identity is equated with bilingual education, then youngsters with low cultural identity (not in bilingual education programs) do better. Attendance in a bilingual education program had no support from our data as a means of dropout prevention; significantly more dropouts than stay-ins came from bilingual education programs. However, if cultural identity is defined in terms of closeness to the culture, then we find that families of non-delinquent youngsters expressed more of a closeness to the culture. This finding supports the notion that programs that effectively support cultural identity are important in the prevention of delinquency.

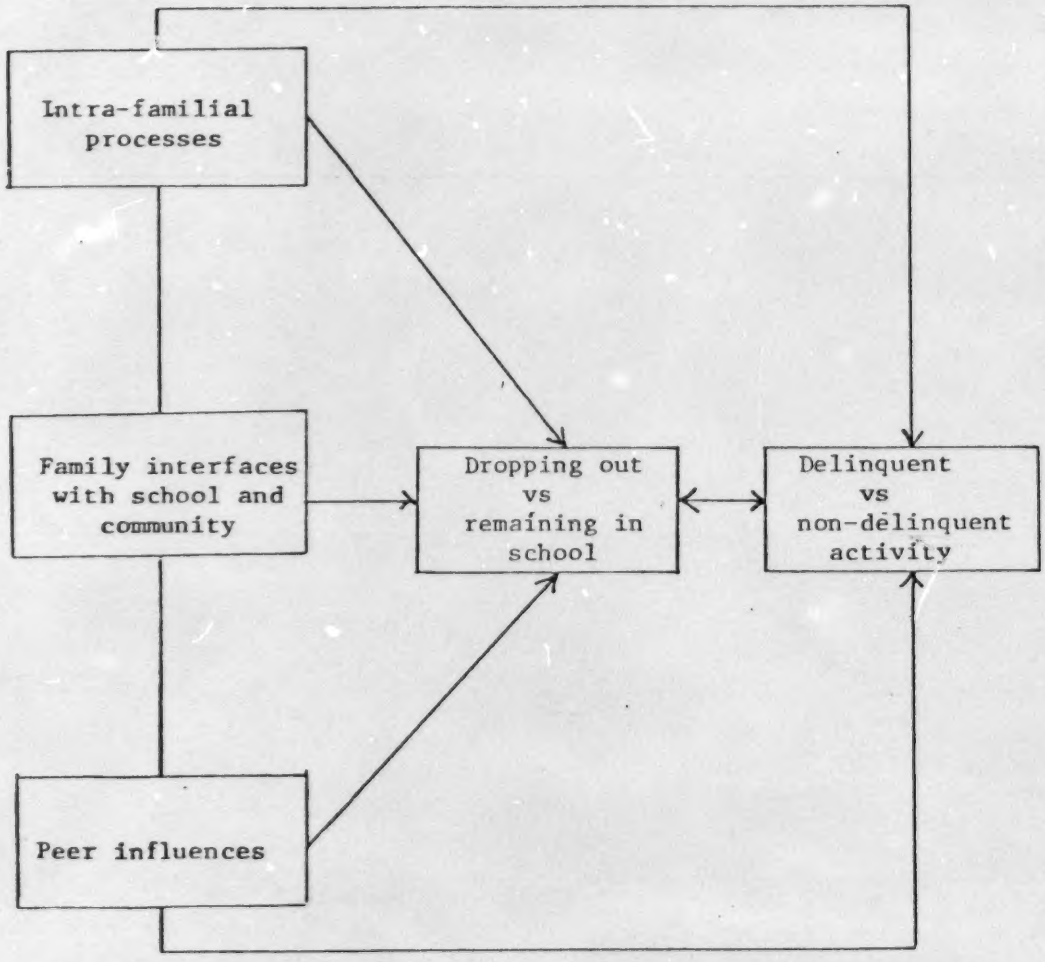
Intra-familial processes
Family interfaces with school and community
Peer influences
Dropping out vs remaining in school
Delinquent vs non-delinquent activity

Figure 1. Preliminary study design model

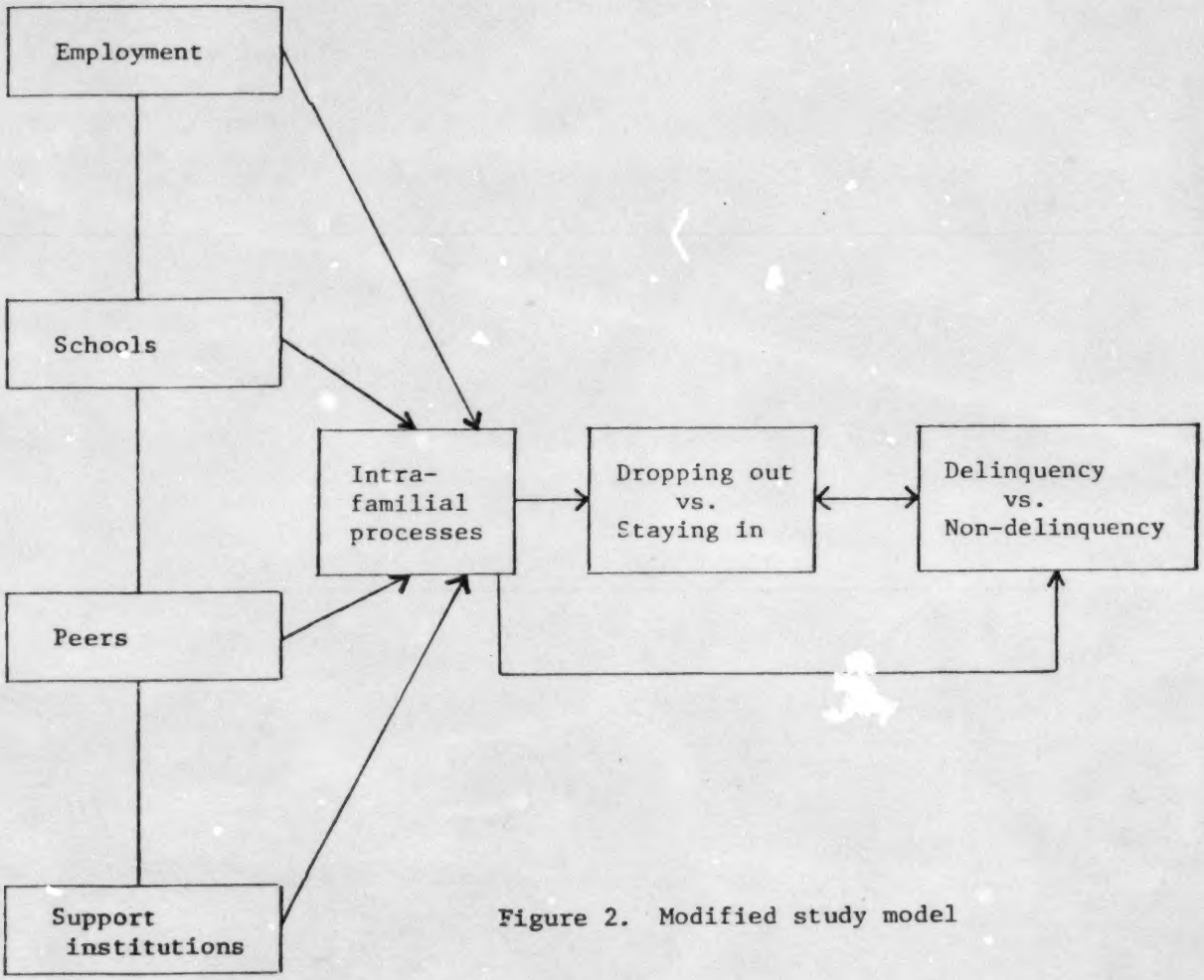

Figure 2. Modified study model

REFERENCES

Alers, J. Puerto Ricans and health: Findings from New York City. New York: Hispanic Research Center, 1978.

Bachman, J., Green, S., & Wirtanen, I. Dropping out: Problem or symptom? Ann Arbor, Mich.: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1971

Bachman, J., O'Malley, P., & Johnston, J. Adolescence to adulthood - change and stability in the lives of young men. Ann Arbor, Mich.: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1978.

Coleman, J. et. al. Public and private schools. Chicago: National Opinion Research Center, 1981.

Elliot, D. Delinquency, school attendance and dropout. Social Problems, 1966, 13, 307-314.

Ferracuti, F., Dinitz, S., & Acosta, E. Delinquents and non-delinquents in the Puerto Rican slum culture. Columbus, Ohio: Ohio State University, 1975.

Giordano, P. Girls, guys and gangs: The changing social context of female delinquency. Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology, 1978, 69, 126-132.

Knoke, D. & Burke, P. Log-linear models. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980.

Mukherjee, S. A typological study of school status and delinquency. Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 1971.

Sutherland, E., & Cressey, D. Criminology. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1978.

Wiatrowski, M., Hansell, S., Massey, C. & Wilson, D. Curriculum tracking and delinquency. American Sociological Review, 1982, 47, 151-160.